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STRATEGY REPORT (INCSR) - VOLUME 1

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II. Summary

¶1. With a major world port at Antwerp, an airport with connections throughout Africa, and its proximity to major consumers in the United Kingdom (U.K.) and The Netherlands, Belgium has become a crucial transit point for a variety of illegal drugs, especially cocaine and heroin. Belgium is not a major market for illicit drugs, nor is it a major producer of illicit drugs or chemical precursors used for the production of illicit drugs. Methods of shipment vary, but most drugs seized have been found in cargo freight, or taken from couriers using air transportation.

¶2. Belgian authorities take a proactive approach in interdicting drug shipments and cooperate with the U.S. and other foreign countries to help uncover distribution rings. However, fighting the drug trafficking problem in Belgium can be difficult due to the large ethnic population centers, language, and cultural differences and the cross-border nature of the trafficking trend. Belgium is a party to the 1988 United Nations (U.N.) Drug Convention, and is part of the Dublin Group of countries concerned with combating narcotics trafficking.

II. Status of Country

¶3. Belgium remains a key transit point for illicit drugs bound for The Netherlands, the U.K. and other points in Western Europe.

¶4. The majority of large cocaine shipments are bound for The Netherlands, where Colombian groups continue to dominate drug trafficking. Significant seizures continue to be made, mainly in airfreight en route from South and Central America or West Africa. In 2008, a total of 3,852 kilograms of cocaine were interdicted. To October 2009, 2,766.7 kilograms of cocaine were confiscated by the Belgian Federal Police (BFP).

¶5. Turkish groups, predominately from the Kurdish region of Turkey, control most of the heroin trafficked in Belgium. This heroin is principally shipped through Belgium and The Netherlands to the U.K. Authorities find it difficult to penetrate Turkish trafficking groups responsible for heroin shipping and trafficking because of the language barrier and Turkish criminal groups' reluctance to work with non-Turkish ethnicities. Belgium consumes an estimated 4 tons of heroin per year, which is mostly accounted for by drug tourism from neighboring countries. Belgian authorities seized a total of 63 kilograms of heroin during 2008. Between January and October 2009, this heroin seizure amount rose to 198.9 kilograms.

¶6. Hashish and cannabis remain the most widely distributed and used illicit drugs in Belgium. Although the bulk of the cannabis consumed in Belgium is produced in Morocco, domestic cultivation continues to be encountered. Belgian authorities seized 4,891 kilograms of marijuana and 1,529 kilograms of hashish during ¶2008. Between January and October 2009, marijuana seizures totaled 378.38 kilograms and hashish seizures totaled 11,563 kilograms.

¶7. Belgium produces small amounts of Amphetamine Type

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Stimulants (ATS) and ecstasy. Seizures of ATS and ecstasy have dropped compared to previous years. During 2007, Belgian authorities seized 483.1 kilograms of amphetamine and 541,245 ecstasy tablets. These seizure numbers fell in 2008, with 411 kilograms of amphetamine and 162,821 ecstasy tablets seized. Between January and October 2009, Belgian authorities have seized 34.24 kilograms of amphetamine and 29,331 ecstasy tablets.

¶8. Belgium has a substantial pharmaceutical production sector. The country manufactures methamphetamine precursors to a very limited extent, but it is not a final destination for international shipments of these precursors. The ephedrine market is mainly controlled by Mexicans who purchase both legal (i.e., cold medicine and dietary supplements) and illegal ephedrine, and ship it to Mexico, where it is used to produce methamphetamine for distribution in the U.S. Since ephedrine is strictly regulated in the U.S., Belgium and other Western European countries have seen an increase in transshipments of ephedrine and other methamphetamine precursors.

The Belgian authorities reported the seizure of 13,400,000 ephedrine pills in 2 incidents during 2008. No figures for 2009 are available. The shipments seized in 2008 were reportedly destined for Mexico. In instances where precursor diversion for methamphetamine manufacturing purposes was suspected, Belgian authorities have cooperated by executing international

controlled deliveries (ICD) to the destinations, or by seizing the shipments when the ICD is not possible.

¶9. In the past, Israeli groups controlled most of the MDMA/ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine) production and shipping to the U.S., but these organized crime groups have been disrupted by enforcement measures and their influence has diminished.

¶10. During 2008, Belgian authorities also encountered and seized 23 liters of GHB, 5,119 kilograms of khat, 55 kilograms of phenacetine, 0.6 kilograms of opium, and 10,240 pills of benzodiazepine. In 2009 upto October, the BFP seized 88.1 liters of GHB, 758.9 kilograms of khat, 55 kilograms of phenacetine, 4.5 kilograms of opium, and 6,180 pills of benzodiazepine.

III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2009

¶11. Policy Initiatives. Belgium is a major backer for COSPOL (Comprehensive Operational Strategic Planning for the Police), which is a new methodology for multinational police cooperation. This program was created for the Police Chiefs Task Force functioning under direction of the European Union. At a recent COSPOL meeting, Belgian and other EU police officials discussed plans to share information in order to create a database of places indicating where illicit lab equipment and drug producing chemicals are shipped and manufactured. The database also includes information on the trade in drug related chemicals and laboratory materials.

¶12. Belgium also participates in "Drugwatch", a non-profit information network and advocacy organization that provides policymakers, media

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and the public with current narcotics information. In cooperation with "Drugwatch", Belgium is participating in a program focused on monitoring the internet to identify narcotic sale and production in Belgium.

¶13. The Federal Prosecutor's Office, established in 2002, works to centralize and facilitate mutual legal assistance requests on drug trafficking investigations and prosecutions.

¶14. Law Enforcement Efforts. Belgian law enforcement authorities actively investigate individuals and organizations involved in illegal narcotics trafficking. In keeping with Belgium's drug control strategy, efforts are focused on combating synthetic drugs, heroin and cocaine, and more recently, cannabis. Belgian authorities continue to cooperate closely and effectively with DEA officials stationed in Brussels. At Brussels' Zaventem International Airport, non-uniformed police search for drug couriers

and continue to be proficient. Authorities utilize canine and aerial apprehension strategies on both the local and federal levels to help fight illicit drug production and shipment in Belgium. The Canine Support Service (DSCH) has trained dog teams to search for drugs. Dog teams are used mostly in airports and train stations, while the Aerial Support Service (DSAS) has made a concerted effort to increase the number of hours it spends in the sky in an attempt to detect drug laboratories across the nation. Belgium participates in a recent initiative to set up a database for European airports. The database is used to transfer narcotic related information to airports throughout Europe in order to increase cooperation among police forces and governments.

¶15. Corruption. Legal measures exist to combat and punish corruption. No serious cases of corruption related to drugs have been uncovered in Belgium thus far in 2009. Money laundering has been illegal in Belgium since 1993, and the country's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) (CTIF-CFI) is continually active in efforts to investigate money laundering. No senior official of the Belgian government is known to have engaged in, encouraged or facilitated the illicit production or distribution of drugs and illegal substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions thus far in ¶2009.

¶16. Agreements and Treaties. Belgium is party to the 1988 U.N. Drug Convention, the 1961 U.N. Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the 1971 U.N. Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Belgium also is a party to the U.N. Convention against Corruption, the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols against migrant smuggling, trafficking in persons, and illegal manufacturing and trafficking of firearms. The U.S. and Belgium have an extradition treaty and a Mutual Legal Assistance treaty (MLAT). Belgium ratified the new U.S./E.U. MLAT and Extradition Agreements in 2009. Under a bilateral agreement

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with the U.S., as part of the U.S. Container Security Initiative (CSI), U.S. Customs officials are stationed at the Port of Antwerp to serve as observers and advisors to Belgian Customs inspectors on U.S.-bound sea freight shipments. Belgium also has an MOU with the USG to carry U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDET) on Belgian Navy vessels in the Caribbean Sea.

¶17. Cultivation/Production. Belgium's role as a transit

point for major drug shipments, particularly heroin and cocaine, is more significant than its own production of illegal drugs. However, cultivation of cannabis increasingly involves elaborate, large-scale indoor operations in Belgium, particularly near The Netherlands, and increasingly in other regions. Dutch traffickers are frequently connected to these production operations. Belgian authorities seized 113,513 marijuana plants during 2008. Initial statistics for this year show that 422 cannabis plantations have been dismantled between January and October 2009 in Belgium. The dismantled plantations had a total capacity of 178,055 plants.

¶18. Dutch traffickers are involved in Belgium's production of Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS). As Dutch law enforcement pressures mount on producers of ecstasy and other ATS in The Netherlands, some Dutch producers either look to Belgian producers to meet their supply needs, or to establish their own facilities in Belgium. During 2008, Belgian authorities discovered 6 synthetic drug laboratories: 4 amphetamine labs, 1 GHB lab, and 1 ecstasy lab. Between January and October 2009, Belgian authorities seized 2 synthetic drug laboratories, both described as "kitchen labs" and have also seized 4 synthetic drug waste dumpsites.

¶19. Drug Flow/Transit. Belgium is an important transit point for illegal drug trafficking in Europe. It has been estimated that about 25 percent of drugs from South America moving through Europe eventually transit Belgium, especially cocaine. These drugs are ultimately shipped to the U.K., The Netherlands, and other points in Western Europe. Antwerp's port continues to be one of the preferred transit points for cocaine imported to Europe. The flow of cocaine to Belgium is mainly controlled by Colombian organizations with representative residing in Africa and in the local region. Some Antwerp port employees have been documented as being involved in the receipt and off-loading of cocaine upon arrival at the port. Zaventem National Airport has become a major point of entry for couriers, who hide drugs in their baggage or on their persons. Most of the cocaine originates in South America and transits through either West Africa or other countries in South America; however, between January and October 2009, cocaine couriers reportedly departed from Central and South America more often than from West Africa. The other active cocaine trafficking groups in Belgium are Surinamese, Chilean, Ecuadorian, and Israeli.

¶20. The Port of Antwerp is also an important transit point for cannabis and hashish. The Netherlands continues to supply both

marijuana and hashish to Belgian traffickers. Belgium remains a transit country for heroin destined for the British market. Seizures over the past five years and intelligence indicate that Belgium continues to be a secondary distribution and packaging center for heroin coming along the Balkan Route. Turkish groups dominate the trafficking of heroin in Belgium. The Belgian Federal Police have identified commercial (TIR) trucks from Turkey as the single largest transportation mechanism for westbound heroin entering Belgium.

¶21. Domestic Programs. Belgium has an active drug education program administered by the regional governments (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels), which targets the country's youth. These programs include education campaigns, drug hotlines, HIV and hepatitis prevention programs, detoxification programs, and a pilot program for "drug-free" prison sections. Belgium continues to direct its programs at individuals who influence young people versus young people themselves. In general, Belgian society views teachers, coaches, clergy, and other adults as better suited to deliver the counter-narcotics message to the target audience because they already are known and respected by young people.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

¶22. Bilateral Cooperation. The U.S. and Belgium regularly share drug-related information. Counter narcotics officials in the BFP, Federal Prosecutor's Office, and Ministry of Justice are fully engaged with their U.S. counterparts. The U.S. continues to coordinate with Belgian authorities to identify and investigate both suppliers and shippers of precursor chemicals. The U.S. trained and certified several Belgian Federal Officers in clandestine laboratory search and seizure methods.

¶23. The Road Ahead. Belgium has always been open to international support to combat illicit drug trafficking and production. The U.S. looks forward to continued cooperation and support from Belgium in combating drug-related crime.

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